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SUMMERTIME TOYS --- OR THE BACKYARD PLAYGROUND. ★ JUN 10 1929 ★

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U.S. Department of Agriculture
A radio talk by Mrs. Rowena Schmidt Carpenter, Bureau of Home Economics, on the Department of Agriculture noonhour network program, through Station WRC... and 16 other stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company, on Wednesday, May 29, 1929, at 1:38 p. m., Eastern Standard Time.

---ooOoo---

Something to play with out-of-doors, in the summertime or on any day of the year that the weather permits, in the backyards, the side yard, or a vacant lot across the street! That is what I mean by summertime toys, or the backyard playground. Every child needs to be out in the fresh air and sunshine, filling his lungs with oxygen, and using his growing muscles. During cool weather he plays vigorously to keep his body warm, and his cheeks rosy. When the hot summer days come, he is not quite so active, but he lets the sunshine soak into his tender skin and gradually give him a healthy coat of tan. Nothing really takes the place of out-of-door play.

It is always possible to find a spot someplace to make a family or a neighborhood playground. It need not be expensive to stock it with suitable toys or play equipment, nor does it require a large yard. Every place equipped for children to play should have something to swing on, something to climb on, and a pile of sand for less active play. Children love, also, to have some place to slide down. And a wagon, a scooter, a tricycle, or a pair of skates, if properly used, are good to exercise and to teach the little child to balance himself. A variety of play equipment used by a small group of children offers a chance to learn something about personal rights, and about sharing. When and what do we share? What is mine, and what is his; and when do we trade? What is a "turn?" When is MY turn? These are things that little children need to learn. In these days of small families, you see, there are many advantages in a neighborhood playground.

I have a friend in a large city in the middlewest who wanted her children to play outside to keep husky and healthy. Her own backyard was not large enough for active play, nor was any other backyard in the block. The school playground was too far away. So she telephoned the owner of a vacant lot across the street and got permission to use it in exchange for keeping the grass mowed all summer. And then she spoke to each neighbor in the block who had young children. The plan was to equip the play space cooperatively. The children earned some of the money by having ice cream sales, so they would feel it was their own playground. The parents contributed a little cash, and some of the fathers helped put up the rope swings --(two of them, different heights from the ground). They fenced in the sand pile with boards to keep the rain from washing it away, and they set up a ladder-like, climbing frame. Mothers took short turns parts of each day at first visiting the playground to encourage fair play and the sharing of the toys. As the summer wore on and the success of the venture was assured, a slide was added. You may wonder if a group of children, related or just playmates, can play together in peace and happiness for any length of time with everybody having a fair turn. They can if they are taught what fair play is. The spirit of common ownership, and of sharing, that comes from group play is as valuable as the healthy bodies that out-door life develops.

Let me tell you about the group of tiny tots, aged two years to three and a half years, who play together at the nursery school of the Child Research Center here in Washington. They have a big sand box, several kinds of swings, a climbing frame with round ladder rungs, sloping boards to walk up while learning to balance, and various things to ride on: tricycles, wagons, etc. Sometimes there are as many as 20 little tots at nursery school the same day. Of course the play yard is large, and there are a good many things to select from, but that does not do away with the chance that two or more children may want the same toy at the same time! And they often do, but the teacher understands youthful minds, and how to appeal to them, and she reasons patiently: "Listen, Jim, you've had a long turn with the wagon. Alice hasn't had it at all. It is Alice's turn now. Maybe you can have it again later. You may help me feed the pets now. You see, I am getting their dinner ready." Note: she doesn't say "You must not" or "You can't" or "Don't you WANT to let Alice have a turn now?" She just makes plain, positive statements, quietly and without stress or reproof in her voice. At the same time, she offers some substitute game or toy to take Jim's interest. Sometimes, of course, there are temper tantrums or other emotional scenes, but the settlement is always made the fair way, and in time the idea sinks in.

You may prefer to have your child or children play alone in their own backyard. The selection of play equipment and the training for its use are the same: Something to exercise large and small muscles all over the body, and a sandpile for the younger children. A chance to learn what it means to own, to share, and to take good care of treasured toys. Above all, a place in the out-of-doors, where there is air and sunshine and SPACE to stretch, to romp and to grow.

